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ABSTRACT

Feminist perspectives provide a basis for examining the nature of participation in outdoor experiences, the goals of outdoor leadership, and the meanings associated with the outdoors. Feminism is concerned with the correction of both the invisibility and distortion of female experience in ways relevant to social change and removal of social inequality. In this essay, perspectives on feminism and the diversity of women's experiences serve as a critique of existing practice, a means for correcting biases, and a foundation for the transformation of outdoor participation and leadership. A literature review reveals five conceptual phases of research and practice: invisibility of women's outdoor participation and leadership, women's experiences acknowledged but judged by male standards, focus on dichotomous sex differences in leadership, woman-centered analyses that challenge traditional androcentric notions about the outdoors, and analyses of gender relations and socialization to gender roles. Corrective mechanisms for providing women with outdoor leadership opportunities have been based on two contrasting approaches: making women more like men in their leadership style, and preserving and developing what has been defined as typically female. A third alternative--a transformative feminist perspective--suggests that outdoor leadership is not defined by gender or gender-related traits and proposes an organizational model in which all participants are empowered to develop expertise and assume leadership roles. Contains 27 references. (SV)

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Feminist Perspectives on Outdoor Leadership

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ED 412 043

Several years ago I was teaching a class on "camping skills for women" through the university continuing education program. I spent several classes talking about and demonstrating camping skills. The practical experience was a weekend, flatwater-canoe camping trip. All of the participants said that they had canoed before, but a refresher course on canoe safety was conducted before the weekend. After a brief introduction on land, I asked the women to go to the bow or the stern of the canoe where they planned to paddle. Every woman went to the bow of the canoe. None had ever been in the stern or "steering" position. When I commented about the situation, the women indicated that fathers, husbands, boyfriends, or significant others had generally taken that position. This predicament led me to ask questions about women's involvement in the outdoors and how feminist perspectives might enhance outdoor experiences for females, as well as males.

The purpose of this chapter is to show how feminist perspectives might be applied to outdoor leadership. This purpose will be accomplished by using the categories of critique, correction, and transformation to describe outdoor involvement from feminist perspectives (Eichler, 1980). Although many questions remain unanswered concerning how the traditional male model of leadership dominates expectations of outdoor leadership, this analysis will challenge the assumptions of traditional leadership models and make applications to outdoor involvement.

A Grounding in Feminism

Feminist perspectives provide a basis for examining the nature of participation, the goals of leadership, and the meanings associated with the outdoors. Feminism is concerned with the correction of both the invisibility and distortion of female experience in ways relevant to social change and the removal of all forms of inequality and oppression in society (Henderson, Bialeschki, Shaw, & Freysinger, 1989). These

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perspectives are useful for understanding outdoor leadership experiences. For example, liberal feminists would suggest that women ought to have equal rights in outdoor participation and that their leadership opportunities ought to be similar to those of men. Cultural feminist philosophy focuses on seeing and celebrating the uniqueness of women's outdoor experiences and leadership styles; radical feminists provide a basis for how women ought to choose their own models of outdoor leadership that may not resemble male models at all. No one view of feminism, however, provides all the perspectives necessary. Together, the philosophies of feminism can give a broader understanding of outdoor experiences.

One important aspect of the outdoors is the recognition of the diversity among women that exists. In this discussion, space and time require talking about women in general. Leaders, however, must keep in mind the potential differences in experiences of girls and women related to culture, race, age, class, physical and mental ability, motherhood, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or other social constructions. In the following sections, perspectives on feminism and the diversity of women's experiences will serve as a critique of existing practice, a means for correcting biases that exist, and a groundwork for the transformation (Eichler, 1980) of outdoor participation and leadership.

A Feminist Critique of Outdoor Experiences

Any feminist analysis begins with a critique of the existing structures. This critique allows issues and challenges to be uncovered. In addition, the body of knowledge about women and their interests and abilities in the outdoors is also increasing due to various critiques of literature and practice. According to Henderson (1994), Tetreault's (1985) feminist phase theory provides a useful perspective on the critique and evolution of research on women's recreation/leisure and outdoor experiences. Five conceptual phases were identified that will be applied to a discussion of women's outdoor leadership: womanless, add women and stir, dichotomous differences, women-centered, and gender/gender relations.

The womanless phase of research and practice has hidden women's outdoor involvement. As outdoor historians have begun to discover, women have always been leaders, albeit often silent, in the outdoors. For example, in the early 1900s, some women found the value of activities such as mountaineering, canoeing, and exploring to symbolically represent freedom from traditional Victorian roles and a move toward independence and equality (Bialeschki, 1990). Women commonly participated in outdoor activities, but were often obscured in the literature by the exploits of male colleagues, by their relegation to a helpmate role, or by their achievements being questioned or trivialized (LaBastille, 1980; Lynch, 1987). Many women know little about the active involvement of women in the outdoors in the last 100 years. A 1905 ascent of Mt. Rainier, for example, had 112 ascent members—46 of whom were women (Kaufmann, 1986). Historically, women have been

invisible in outdoor pursuits and have been inaccurately depicted because of the incompatibility between traditional perceptions of women's roles and their participation in outdoor activities. As women's roles in society change, the opportunities they have for visible leadership are also changing.

More women than ever before are participating in outdoor activities. Today the number of women involved in physical activities often equals or outnumbers men (*Statistical abstract*, 1991). For example, in 1989 almost 26 million women in the United States went backpacking and camping; 29 million rode bicycles, 16 million went fishing, and 7 million went skiing. In the 1990s, in all aspects of outdoor recreation, the participation of women will be increasing faster than that of men (Kelly, 1987). Thus, the outdoors is not "womanless" and a need exists for women in outdoor leadership positions.

Related to the invisible aspects is the "add women and stir" phase of research and practice where people are conscious that women might be missing from the outdoors and that some examples or exceptions to the universal male experience might be important to note. Underlying the idea of "adding women" is a notion that women ought to be acknowledged, but such acknowledgment generally means that women are judged in terms of their contributions based on typical male standards. Although examples of prominent women such as Annie Oakley and Mary Shaeffer (the first explorer of the Jasper area of Canada) have been inspirational, they have not provided role models for how many of us experience the outdoors on a day-to-day or vacation-to-vacation basis.

The realization that women participate in the outdoors and that they might be "different" than men resulted in many discussions, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, that focused on dichotomous sex differences as a third phase applied to the critique of feminist outdoor leadership. Leadership has been an especially important topic for examining male and female differences. Although the study of differences can be helpful in understanding behavior, studying differences can also be problematic (Henderson, 1990). Some say that identifying differences affirms women's value and special nature; others say it reinforces the status quo. Differences can seem to imply hierarchy; in other words, one group is seen to be superior or better than the other group. Another risk is that such research can oversimplify and overclaim, and it may also reinforce inequalities through the often-unstated implication that if differences occur, they must be inevitable or "natural."

A critique of what is known about women as outdoor leaders arises to some extent from the roots of leadership research and particularly, research about leadership differences (Henderson & Bialeschki, 1991). The historic identification of stereotypical masculine personality traits has been an artifact of the overwhelmingly large number of men in leadership positions (Friesen, 1983). In the past, males were typically in leadership positions, including outdoor leadership, at the time when leadership was first studied. Thus, a number of models that were developed were based on typical male virtues and values such as the desire for practicality and the utility

of things and ideas; a search for rational truth, power, and influence; objective power and reasoning; and gaining the influence and admiration of others (Loden, 1985). Female values, not traditionally linked with leadership, were associated with a priority on form and harmony; concern for people, unity, and spirituality; a desire to help and care for others; and a concern for beauty and creative expression. These differences in male and female values produced differences in perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors in many areas of life, including perceptions of outdoor leadership. For example, in leadership situations, researchers have identified that females are more concerned with the decision-making process while males tend to be more concerned with the outcomes of the decision (Henderson & Bialeschki, 1991).

The impact of socialization on the differences in leadership roles of women and men is an area that requires acknowledgment when discussing differences in outdoor leadership between women and men. Adkinson (1981) suggested a number of reasons for why women have not been visible in leadership positions in organizations. In some cases, girls and women have not been socialized toward positions of power. Further, women may have low aspirations for leadership positions because they have been socialized to see their role as the bearer of emotion, not power. In addition, some women may have negative attitudes about what leadership means that are inconsistent with how they define themselves (Weller, 1988). For example, leadership sometimes connotes authoritarianism which may not be the style that fits many women.

Examining outdoor leadership from a feminist perspective suggests that researchers and practitioners are only beginning to understand why women have been ignored, acknowledged primarily when they conformed to male standards, or compared to men in outdoor leadership style. Questions need to be addressed concerning whether gender differences exist at all in outdoor leadership and what bearing gender differences may have on the outcomes of outdoor experiences. A critique of outdoor leadership, however, provides a starting point for examining the meaning of leadership for women and has resulted in possible corrective approaches that can be taken.

Corrective Approaches Related to Outdoor Leadership

Tetreault's (1985) feminist phase theory has also addressed two corrective phases that have particular salience for understanding outdoor leadership for women: women-centered and gender analyses. As a result of collecting additional information about outdoor experiences, more empowering models may be offered to enhance the experiences of women in the outdoors.

Cultural feminists believe that it is women's qualities and experiences, not men's, that should be the measure of significance in society. The women-centered phase examines the experiences of women in an attempt to understand the importance and meaning of women's lives, not as a comparison to men. In this women-

centered perspective, what was formerly devalued (e.g., everyone feeling like they have a say in group decision-making) in the context of women's participation and involvement assumes new value. Women-centered notions have also challenged some of the traditional androcentric ideas about the outdoors. Cultural feminism has helped to generate new ideas, patterns, and ways of examining outdoor experiences. For example, the language used in the outdoors such as "assaulting mountains" has been questioned by feminists who find different meanings in these words. Thus, the focus on women has made the outdoors visible for women and has also opened the door for reinterpreting previous ideas about outdoor behavior for both women and men.

Gender analyses about the outdoors offer the most recent attempt to correct our understanding of women's experiences. Gender or gender relations refers to cultural connections and relationships associated with one's biological sex. Thus, when biological sex is determined at birth as female or male, a huge number of cultural expectations are immediately associated with the child. Gender, then, refers to how women and men contribute to and are influenced by society (Henderson, 1994). One's biological sex leads to a lifetime of relationships and expectations based on gender that have implications for outdoor participation and leadership. The meaning of gender is constructed by society and each of us is socialized into that construction.

The analysis of gender and gender relations appears to offer the most potential in the 1990s for understanding outdoor leadership for both females and males. Gender scholarship addresses the complexity of expectations, roles, and behavior associated with being male, as well as being female. Overgeneralizations about feminine and masculine behavior result in stereotypes which limit people's options (e.g., assuming that females will become too emotional in a dangerous situation or that males cannot be sensitive to a participant's personal problems). Individuals may be deprived of originality and initiative if they are limited to only certain gender-appropriate behaviors.

Thus, as the experiences of women as well as the analysis of gender relations have been factored into research and practice, the need for understanding both the process and product variables of outdoor leadership has become more apparent (Loden, 1985). Most of the literature of the last fifteen years that has examined gender roles and leadership suggest that gender per se is not necessarily significant, but that sex-role stereotypes and power differences are reflected in the leadership styles of men and women (Adkinson, 1981; Kanter, 1977).

Leadership, as generally defined today, is a function of two types of behaviors (Jordan, 1989). The first is categorized as instrumental or initiation behaviors. This category is concerned with orientation toward task, production, outcomes, or initiating structure. These behaviors are traditionally equated with the masculine stereotype. The second category is labeled as consideration or expressive behaviors. Orientation toward the affective, socio-emotional support relationships and people

is the primary component of this category. Consideration and expressive behaviors have traditionally been identified with the feminine stereotype. The expressive category originally was not considered as valuable or necessary to good leadership as was the instrumental category (Friesen, 1983; Jordan, 1989; Naisbitt & Aburdene, 1990). The importance of a variety of leadership patterns and the expressive dimensions that women often bring to leadership situations is becoming evident (Denmark, 1977; Naisbitt & Aburdene, 1990), but much more research is necessary to demonstrate how leadership styles and performance effectiveness are related in an area such as the outdoors.

Two contrasting approaches (Fasting, 1987) provide an initial framework for how feminism can provide a corrective mechanism for providing women with opportunities for outdoor leadership. These corrective approaches include the possibilities of: a) women becoming more like men in their leadership, and b) women participants and leaders preserving and developing what has been defined as typically female. Neither of these approaches is agreed upon by feminists as THE perspective to follow, but they offer examples for examining how feminism might correct some of the ways we have previously viewed outdoor leadership.

Women becoming like men is an outgrowth of liberal feminism and the equal rights struggle (Henderson & Bialeschki, 1991). It implies that women should be given the same opportunities in outdoor involvement and leadership as men. This perspective means equality on men's terms with women striving to get more of what men have always had. The approach is based on the attempt to remove or compensate for the social impediments that have prevented women from competing on equal terms with men, without challenging traditional hierarchical structures (Hargreaves, 1990). Examples of the success of this pragmatic approach are seen when *more* outdoor opportunities are *more* accessible to *more* women. It assumes no biological explanations for women's subordination and assumed participation rates; thus, an assumption of culture, not biology, acts as the barrier to women in outdoor leadership, a barrier that can be removed through rational intervention.

Major problems exist with the approach of women becoming more like men. The underlying assumption that women just need to "catch up" with the men would appear to be more concerned with quantitative rather than qualitative changes. This vision of women's involvement in the outdoors is idealized with no real question as to where the values about participation and leadership originate or whose interest they serve. Questions about equality for which particular women, for what purpose, and according to what criteria are ignored (Hargreaves, 1990). Another problem is that achievement of this approach would lead one to view women as a homogeneous group where increased participation in leadership roles is an improvement for women in general. Women from different backgrounds, however, may not experience the outdoors in the same way and often have different expectations and opportunities. In reality, this approach may actually benefit only a small minority of women. Lastly, this approach assumes that women want to be leaders in the same

way in which men are; rather than challenge the masculine concept of leadership, liberalism endorses it (Fastings, 1987; Hargreaves, 1990). As a consequence, the values that dominate male outdoor culture and male leadership will be internalized by females who wish to be leaders. Nevertheless, the liberal feminist approach to leadership through equal opportunity seems to be a popular approach and is accepted by many people interested in getting women more involved in outdoor experiences.

A second feminist approach to outdoor involvement proposes that women should preserve and develop what has been defined as typically female. This approach has evolved from cultural and radical feminism as a result of women's feelings of powerlessness, frustration, and anger resulting from discrimination and male chauvinism in the outdoors. Proponents of this view suggest that the very definition and conduct of leadership must be changed to allow a woman's voice to emerge in outdoor activities and leadership interactions. The meanings women attribute to their involvement in the outdoors become the focus in preserving and developing typical female styles.

This corrective approach proposes that the characteristics associated with male participation and leadership are sometimes undesirable and that women should build alternative models of leadership that are intrinsically more liberating, rather than emulate the traditional, masculine-based models (Henderson & Bialeschki, 1991). Thus, the characteristics normally ascribed to men in the outdoors, such as competitiveness, aggression, and authoritarianism, are rejected and replaced with characteristics popularly defined as female, such as cooperation, nurturance, and consensus. This approach addresses a "pro-woman" stance that asserts women's difference from men and strives to create an environment where women feel free from discrimination and sexism, and where a greater sense of control and autonomy is felt.

Two major problems appear when examining this approach of preserving and developing what has been defined as typically feminine. First, focusing on femaleness supports the idea that there are distinctive biological natures of males and females which are treated as if they are culturally and historically universal; the idea of "feminine-appropriate" and "masculine-appropriate" participation or leadership locks people into a fixed concept of the "natural," which is blind to history and ignores changing feminine and masculine identities and different gender relations (Hargreaves, 1990). The second problem is that the women-centered approach can create social divisions not only specifically between women and men, but also even between different groups of women and different groups of men. The experience of males in the outdoors has been a dominant paradigm, but not necessarily universal for all males. In relation to the diversity of our society, a female perspective may not represent all female perspectives any more than all males have been represented by the traditional male approach.

A Time for Transformation

I would like to propose a third perspective that offers potential for using feminism as a way to transform women's (and men's) leadership in the outdoors. This transformational feminist perspective is based on the notion that leadership is not necessarily defined by gender or gender-related traits (Cimperman, 1986), but that females have contributions in the outdoors. This transformational feminist perspective is both radical and commonsensical. Many people agree that gender-biased leadership styles must change in ways that will empower all participants.

Karsten (1994) has offered some specific aspects of organizational structure change that may provide a foundation for feminist transformative models regarding outdoor involvement. If we are to avoid situations where women are channeled into traditional roles, such as in the case of the canoe story told at the beginning of this chapter, and if we are to enable women and men to provide outdoor experiences that empower participants, new models are appropriate. The dimensions of the models are not unlike many of the characteristics of organic, as opposed to mechanistic, organizations. Organic organizations allow for changes and enable each individual to see how she/he fits within a particular experience.

In one example of a transformative feminist model, outdoor leadership tasks would not be highly specialized. All individuals would have an opportunity to learn a variety of skills with the focus on the process and not necessarily the product. The leadership power from a feminist perspective would be based on expertise, not necessarily position. Along with this notion of power would be the desire to allow all participants to develop expertise so they can assume leadership positions. A feminist transformative perspective would suggest that conflict resolution would be addressed by interaction among those in conflict. In addition, communication would be upward, downward, and lateral. The content of that communication would be oriented toward advice, counsel, and collective decision making. Certain rules or guidelines for safety and for effective group interaction would be necessary, but they would be understood and enforced by all participants, not just the designated leader. Thus, control would be the internal responsibility of each individual. Loyalty to the group would also be the focus of this type of interaction in the outdoors.

This evolving feminist organizational model has been successfully used by some outdoor groups. The staff at Woodswomen, Inc., for example, consciously apply a transformational feminist approach to all their groups with the mission of empowering girls and women through the outdoors. Mitten (1992) has identified three goals that guide their programs:

1. A program philosophy that respects women and adds to self-esteem building;
2. Leaders who are skilled in implementing the program philosophy; and
3. Participants who have choices about and within the experience. (p. 56)

These goals are then translated and transformed into action in the way that participants and leaders work together toward providing empowering outdoor experiences. Specifically, the ways that feminist transformational leadership is applied at Woodswomen, Inc., can be seen in these principles and objectives:

- To create an atmosphere that is safe and encourages women to feel emotionally, spiritually, and physically safe
- To travel in the wilderness for its own sake, not using it as a means to an end, not creating situations to take risks or prove competency. Respect and care for the environment during trips is important.
- To be aware that having fun is essential to many people's growth and learning process and that it helps in developing self-esteem
- To create a trip environment supportive of differences in participants' needs and to support the belief that individual needs vary, are valid, and are possible to meet
- To be flexible about goals and understand that there are many workable ways to learn skills and be outdoors
- To recognize that individual accomplishments are different and special to each woman and to encourage women to have their own standards
- To recognize that women do not need to be changed to fit into adventure programs or taught in order to be good enough to participate on outdoor trips
- To emphasize that women's strengths are an asset to outdoor groups
- To understand that leadership is a relationship, not a personality type, and to believe that constructive safe leadership can take many forms
- To avoid a success/failure approach to challenges

(Mitten, 1992, p. 58)

This application of feminist outdoor leadership is not the domain of women only. A number of scholars are discussing the notion of transformational leadership which involves distributing the power for accomplishing tasks to group members (Jordan, 1992). The approach to participation and leadership, however, does have a feminist orientation that has only become evident in the leadership literature since the reemergence of the contemporary feminist movement thirty years ago. The major problem with a feminist transformative approach to outdoor leadership is similar to the problem discussed in the women-like-men equity view—the difficulty in changing traditional perceptions of female and male gender roles when applied to leadership. These changes will not be the result of legislative actions, but rather of a culture that allows women and men both instrumental and expressive characteristics, and does not value males more than females, or products more than processes. The traditional attitudes toward leadership and organizational structures, however, will not be given up easily since they are the underpinnings of political and economic hegemony and power.

Moving Onward

The variety of feminist perspectives presented in this chapter provides a starting point for further examining leadership by women in the outdoors. These analyses help to deconstruct the social structures surrounding traditional involvement in ways that encourage women and men to exhibit outdoor leadership that empowers themselves as well as others. Old authoritarian behaviors are being transformed toward a new mode of leadership designed to coach, inspire, and gain people's commitment (Naisbitt & Aburdene, 1990). Much is yet to be learned about how feminist perspectives can affect outdoor experiences; evolving models will likely emerge in the coming years.

Feminism offers one means for transforming views about outdoor leadership. Feminist perspectives critique and challenge traditional concepts and practices. These perspectives make us ask questions about why women are "supposed" to paddle in the bow of the canoe. Through feminist analyses, the notion of power as domination can also be transformed to focus on empowerment so that all individuals feel comfortable paddling anywhere in a canoe. The concept of empowerment through feminist transformational leadership—where power is shared, differences in leadership styles are valued, and individuals have a high level of control over their environment—is needed by women as well as men to challenge the traditional androcentric views of outdoor participation and provide the highest quality of outdoor leadership for the future.

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